

Proverbs as a Unified Whole

Proverbs 9:1-18 Sermon

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Sometimes it all comes down to a single choice. You ever watch that classic gameshow *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?* It finally got cancelled this summer but the concept was pretty simple. The original gameshow host Regis Philbin would ask a contestant trivia questions. The questions were pretty easy at first but they got progressively harder and harder. But that also meant that each question was worth more and more, ranging from \$100 to \$1,000,000. If you answered all fifteen questions right, you won a million dollars. But if you missed a single question, you lost most of your money.

I didn't watch this show very often but I recently watched a clip of a contestant, a guy named John Carpenter, who made it all the way to the million dollar question. He still had all three of his lifelines. He could ask the audience, take a 50:50 (reduce the answers down from 4 to 2), and he could phone a friend. So he got all the way to the end and he got this question (and if you know the answer don't shout it out):

Which of these U.S. Presidents appeared on the television series "Laugh-In"?

A) Lyndon Johnson; B) Richard Nixon; C) Jimmy Carter; D) Gerald Ford.

By show of hands, who here thinks it was Johnson? Nixon? Carter? or Ford? Or who is wondering "what's Laugh-In?" This is a million dollar question. And the answer is... we'll be right back! We're going to come back to the answer because today I want to ask you a question that has even higher stakes than a million dollars. What's at stake is heaven and hell. What's at stake is your and my eternal destination.

Which path will you take?

A) The way of wisdom; B) The way of folly.

Today we're coming to the end of the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs. It's a natural close to the first part of the book. Next week we're going to pick up in Proverbs 30 as we look the end of the book, and then after that we'll jump into some of the center, more topical passages. Throughout the first nine chapters we've been given a choice again and again between two paths, the wise path and the foolish path. Today I want to expand on each of those choices a bit more. The first option is...

A) The way of wisdom (Proverbs 9:1-12)

By way or path I mean not one singular choice but a lifetime of decisions and choices. Are you heading down one path or the other? The way of wisdom...

It begins with a relationship with God.

Let's look more closely at the first four verses.

Proverbs 9:1-4a

- 1 Wisdom has built her house;
she has set up its seven pillars.
- 2 She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine;

- she has also set her table.
3 She has sent out her servants, and she calls
from the highest point of the city,
4 “Let all who are simple come to my house!” (NIV)

Here we find lady wisdom, a metaphor for God, calling out for anyone who is simple to come and eat with her. In this culture for a woman to invite a man to dinner was not like grabbing a bite to eat at Panera. No this is more like a candlelight dinner with steak. Meat was rare because meat was expensive and hard to keep (no refrigeration). Wisdom is inviting him to enter into an intimate relationship with her.

Her house may also be built on the high point of the city (v1,3). If you think back to the author Solomon you realize he was writing from Jerusalem and the high point in Jerusalem is the temple mount where God’s presence dwells. God is inviting simple people to come to his temple and enter into relationship with him and let him grow them and give them his wisdom. God invites us to seek him (Prov 8:17; Rom 3:11; James 1:5). Just like Proverbs 1:7 opened by calling us to “fear the Lord” chapter 9 closes the same way.

Proverbs 9:10

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. (NIV)

Remember last week how Christ Jesus embodies wisdom and actual identifies himself with lady wisdom (Prov 8:22-31; Mat 11:19; Col 1:15-17)? So often when we think about wisdom we think of it as a set of facts or knowledge we can acquire to improve our lives. That’s part of what wisdom is. It’s the skill of living. But that’s not all it is. Wisdom is not just a what but also a who. Wisdom is not a thing but a person. *Jesus is wisdom*. Jesus is wisdom in the flesh. If you want to get wise, get to know Jesus. If you want to get wise, get real with God. Go deep in your relationship with him. God wants us to seek him.

Imagine you’re on *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire* and you decide to use a lifeline. Regis calls your best friend who is waiting for your phone call and you read the question and your friend pauses and says, “That’s a great question! I have no idea. Good luck!” Or what if they just don’t pick up? Our lifeline to God, our Heavenly Father, isn’t like that. We can call on him day or night, when times are good or when times are hard, and no matter what he’ll pick up. We can call on Jesus through prayer at any time.

Whenever we need to make a decision we can ask the Holy Spirit for his wisdom and guidance. God always answers. He speaks to us through his Word, the Bible, as we read it and hear it preached and he speaks to us through his Holy Spirit applying God’s Word to our lives. He doesn’t always give us the answer we want to be true. Sometimes he says yes, sometimes no, sometimes maybe, and other times wait. Sometimes he answers us with silence, inviting us to trust him even more. But God always gives us the right answer, the answer that’s best for us. *The way of wisdom begins with a relationship with God and...*

It displays the character of God.

Wisdom is one of God’s character qualities. *To be wise then is to reflect God’s character*. How does developing wisdom help us reflect the character of our God?

- a. Wisdom is **creative** and **works hard**. (v1 She built a large house.) God is creative/works hard.
- b. Wisdom is **generous**. (v2-6 She offers food and wine.) God is generous.
- c. Wisdom is **teachable**. (v7-9 The wise learn from her.) Jesus grew in wisdom.

As we become wise through a relationship with God we too will display his creativity, his work ethic, his generosity, his wisdom, and a relationship with him leads to eternal life (v10-12 Your days will be many). To be a Christian is not just to have good character or to hold Christian values. You can be someone who is creative, or generous, or teachable, but not have eternal life. This is why wisdom begins and ends with a relationship with God (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10). It's a genuine relationship with God that will then bear the fruit of a character that displays God's character. *The way of wisdom begins with a relationship with God and displays the character of God.*

If lady wisdom is option A there's still another option. You can choose option B, the way of folly, the foolish woman, but she is a tricky lady.

B) The way of folly (Proverbs 9:13-18)

Proverbs 9:13

Folly is an unruly woman;
she is simple and knows nothing.

Tremper Longman III translates this, "Woman Folly is boisterous; she is simpleminded but does not even know it." The problem with foolish men and women, boys and girls, is that they often don't know they're foolish and aren't humble enough to take correction. Lady folly is the complete opposite of lady wisdom.

- a. Folly is **naïve**. (v13 She knows nothing.)
- b. Folly is **lazy**. (v14 She sits at the door of her house.)
- c. Folly is **greedy** and **deceptive**. (v17 Stolen water is sweet.)

Do you know where folly leads? Death (v18 her guests are deep in the realm of the dead). If you choose a life of foolishness and live to satisfy yourself, as Bernie Michaud says, it's like going to dine in a morgue. You're surrounded by the dead. *The way of folly leads to death.*

So maybe you're someone who doesn't want to choose the way of folly, but neither do you want to choose the way of wisdom. You don't want to be in a relationship with God but you're no fool. Well...

You have to choose one way or the other.

You have to choose the way of wisdom through a relationship with God if you want eternal life. To not choose is to choose the way of folly that leads to death. There is no middle ground. There are not four choices like our gameshow but only two, and only one is good. There is no border zone or neutral Switzerland or "kinda Christianity". *There's only the way of wisdom and the way of folly.*

I've been thinking about how the Bible itself presents these two paths throughout the big story of the Bible. It doesn't always appear in the same language as wisdom and folly but it's still there, presenting each of us with a choice. Which will you choose?

Way of Wisdom	Way of Folly
Tree of life	Tree of the knowledge of good and evil
Abel (Seth)	Cain
Abraham/Isaac/Jacob	Lot/Ishmael/Esau

Israel	Egypt, Canaan, Babylon
King David	Saul, Absalom
Jesus Christ	Self/world
Narrow gate	Wide gate
The lamb	The dragon
God	Satan
New Heavens & Earth	Hell

When we choose the way of self or foolishness we're not just making a bad decision. We're choosing the way of Satan over the way of God. All of the proverbs in the center of our book, which seem so topical and disorganized, are all unified by this one idea. **You can either choose God and his ways or you can choose the path that leads to death.** Most proverbs will show this contrast and encourage us to choose God's ways. In this way, Proverbs is a unified whole with one main idea presented in many different bit-sized lessons. Will you choose God's ways today or your own.

So what's my big idea? What is Proverbs as a whole urging us to do? *Choose the way of wisdom. Choose Christ.* Choose to be in relationship with God. Choose him today, tomorrow, and the next day and the next.

But here's the real kicker. Over and over again when God's people Israel can choose the way of wisdom or the way of folly, they often choose the way of folly. They choose to wander. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and King David all represent the way of wisdom and their lives were not perfect. Yes, they chose God, but they often chose their own way as well. Why is that? We actually read the reason back in Proverbs 4.

Proverbs 4:23

Above all else, guard your heart,
for everything you do flows from it. (NIV)

See what we do shows what's in our heart. Our behavior displays what's really true on the inside. What's really true is that all human beings, even the best humans, are bent towards sin. We're professionals at sin. We love it. We like it. It's fun. And that's why God himself had to walk the way of wisdom for us. God entered into this world through Christ Jesus, through wisdom embodied, and walked down that path of wisdom, never swerving to the right or to the left. When we place our faith in him through repentance and belief he grants us his track record. Jesus gives us his wisdom and takes the consequence of our folly.

Through the cross Jesus paid the penalty for our sin. It cost Jesus his life to rescue us from the way of folly. But he rose from the grave and now he rescues us any who believe. Although at times we will stumble back towards the way of folly we are forever forgiven and forever secure in Christ. Through Christ we can begin to walk the right way. We can now begin to show the fruit of a holy and wise life.

Choose the way of wisdom. Choose Christ.

Maybe you want to know what happened with the million dollar question? When Regis read the question to John Carpenter he said he'd like to call his parents. He asked to use his lifeline to call his father. Regis gets his dad on the line and says, "We got your son John with us right now. He's doing pretty well. He's won a half million dollars and he's going for a million dollars." John's dad laughs. He must have been pretty pleased. Regis adds, "And he needs your help to get there. So he's going to come on the line, read four

possible answers, and one of them is the right answer, and the next voice you hear will be John's. You've got thirty seconds. Starts right now."

The 30-seconds countdown clock begins and John says, "Hi dad, I don't really need your help. I just wanted to let you know that I'm gonna win the million dollars." The audience goes wild. Regis smiles and John says, "Because the U.S. President who appeared on "Laugh In" is Richard Nixon. That's my final answer." He was the first player to ever win the million and he used only one lifeline to tell his father he had won. He made the right choice and I hope you will too.

Every time we choose the path of wisdom we are choosing a prize much more valuable than a million dollars. We're choosing God himself and eternal life with him through his son, Christ Jesus. I think that pleases our father. If you haven't called your Heavenly Father up recently call him up today and tell him that by his grace, you choose him and his ways, and you'd love his help walking in that today. Your Heavenly Father would love to hear from you. *Choose the way of wisdom. Choose Christ.*

Jonathan Romig preached an earlier edition of this sermon, "The Wise Choice," at Cornerstone Congregational Church in Westford, MA on August 24th, 2019 when he served there as pastor. You can download a PDF at archive.org or read it on [Substack](#). Jonathan attended Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary ([GCTS](#)) where he earned his Master of Divinity (M.Div) and Doctor of Ministry (D.Min).

Discussion Questions

Questions for small groups, Bible studies, or personal devotionals:

1. What is the way of Wisdom?
2. How does wisdom reflect God's character?
3. What is folly and why is it tempting?
4. In what way is Proverbs a unified whole?
5. How does Jesus provide for our wisdom?
6. Where do you especially need to walk in the way of wisdom in your life?
7. What does it look like for our community to choose the way of wisdom today?

Resource Recommendations

Some of the links in this manuscript are affiliate links ("aff link"), which means we get a small percentage if you purchase the resource through the link. We recommend checking out your local library or thrift store.

[How To Read Proverbs](#) (affiliate link) by Tremper Longman III

[The Book of Proverbs](#) by BibleProject

Free Sermon Notes Worksheet ([PDF](#))

[The Wise Choice on Proverbs 9:1-18](#) (original title) by Jonathan Romig

Proverbs Sermon Series

Go through the Proverbs with Jonathan Romig in this sermon series: [Everyday Wisdom](#)

Endnotes

Wikipedia contributors, "John Carpenter (game show contestant)," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=John_Carpenter_\(game_show_contestant\)&oldid=903605093](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=John_Carpenter_(game_show_contestant)&oldid=903605093) (accessed August 22, 2019).

God calls us to his temple, which we know to be Christ Jesus, who the very presence of God fills. Jesus is God's tabernacle. See John 1:14.

"The skill of living." Tremper Longman III. *How To Read Proverbs*.

Tremper Longman, III, *Proverbs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, a Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2015). 215.

“Folly is naive. (v13 She knows nothing.)” See NASB translation.

In one of his sermon manuscripts, Bernie Michaud talked about dining in a nursing home surrounded by people who have “died” and you don’t even know it.

“All of the proverbs in the center of our book, which seem so topical and disorganized, are all unified by this one idea. You can either choose God and his ways or you can choose Satan and his.” Tremper Longman III uses Proverbs 10:1 to make this point.

Everyday
Wisdom

Proverbs 9:1-18



The choice is yours...

You can watch this sermon on [YouTube](#).

